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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3095
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5966
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5161
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0393
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1002
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0032
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1634
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9837
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 1318
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0438
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0956
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0342
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1706
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0782
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3255
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0807
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0579
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0276
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2810
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000332

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
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FRC FT LAUDERDALE FOR CLAMBERT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ CONVOKES MEGA-MARCH, TARGETS "THE EMPIRE"

REF: A. CARACAS 00298

[1](#)B. 04 CARACAS 03928

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK A. WELLS FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) President Chavez convoked a march of more than a million supporters February 4 to commemorate the anniversary of his failed 1992 coup. During his march speech and the following day's Alo Presidente broadcast, Chavez called on his supporters to unite and prepare themselves for what he predicted would be a tough fight against "the Empire," which "will do whatever it takes" to prevent his re-election and derail the Bolivarian revolution. He raised the case of the recently expelled U.S. Naval Attache and threatened to arrest any other U.S. spies and throw them in prison. He outlined an array of new handouts to his followers ranging from new money for the cooperatives to fixing Caracas' numerous potholes. An opposition counter-march on February 4 was poorly attended, and only served to highlight the Chavista march. Most of Chavez' espionage warnings appear to be bluster, for now, although we cannot rule out future actions against the Embassy. End Summary.

Chavez vs. "The Empire"

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to Emboff observations and press accounts, the government brought in some 1.5 million people, using (illegally) scores of state and city busses, to

commemorate the 14th anniversary of President Chavez' failed 1992 coup. One Embassy contact reported offers of money--undoubtedly from government coffers--and the prospect of a free shopping trip to Caracas enticed many to attend. President Chavez devoted nearly three-fourths of his address to readying supporters for the upcoming elections, which he characterized in terms of a battle against the USG. Officially launching his presidential campaign, called Santa Ines II, Chavez declared that his opponent was not the traditional opposition parties, but the United States. The USG had two plans, he claimed. First, take advantage of the government's weaknesses and infighting to weaken popular support; then, failing that, orchestrate a last-minute opposition withdrawal as occurred in the 2005 legislative elections, encourage high abstention, allege fraud and declare the election illegitimate as a pretext for not recognizing the government. He asserted that "Plan A" was already in play, citing press attention on the bridge collapse and polls showing a loss of support for the government as examples of alleged USG attempts to turn public opinion against him. He also cited and ridiculed recent statements by Secretary Rumsfeld, DNI Negroponte, and A/S Shannon.

13. (SBU) Chavez read what he said were excerpts of e-mail exchanges between the recently expelled Naval Attache and a contact as proof of the espionage charges against the Attache. He warned that he was "hunting" other alleged US Embassy spies, specifically an "Army Lt. Colonel," and would not hesitate to arrest, imprison, and then expel any other US personnel caught spying. In a further show of defiance against the "imperialists," Chavez announced plans to request additional funds from the National Assembly to buy rocket

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launchers ("lanza-cohetes," a term also used to refer to MANPADS) and additional Kalishnikov weapons from countries that will not be susceptible to US pressure, and to accelerate the integration of the military reserve and National Guard so that one million Venezuelans will be ready to defend against a possible US invasion. He also threatened to close refineries in the United States, if the USG cut ties with Venezuela. He briefly reiterated the gravity of the challenge ahead during his Alo Presidente show the next day, saying the United States will do "whatever it takes" to try to defeat him; therefore, all supporters need to unite to defend the revolution and the country.

Chavez Throws Money at Efficiency Problem

14. (SBU) Toward the end of the February 4 speech, Chavez built on the electoral and anti-corruption themes developed February 2 (ref a). He heavily criticized government officials for their inefficiency and bemoaned that such behavior could allow the US to defeat him. To break through the stilted, inefficient bureaucracy, he announced a list of engagements he has over the next three weeks, most of which follow up on ideas mentioned two days before. For example, during the week of the February 6, Chavez will give approximately 19 billion Bolivars (USD 8.8 million) to community councils, or "concejos comunales" in Spanish (ref a), and 111 billion Bolivars (USD 51.6 million) to various cooperatives for projects so that communities can help themselves, he said. He will also preside over the "re-nationalization" of an oil concession in Zulia state, open the Latin-American School of Sports in Cojedes State, and distribute 40 billion Bolivars (USD 18.6 million) so recent graduates from a petroleum program at a technical school can form their own cooperative.

15. (SBU) Chavez will have a similarly busy schedule the following week, including dispensing funds to the Student Federation of Bolivarian Schools, distributing the first tranche of pension payments to 25,000 retired workers who

have almost completed the required number of social security contributions, and inaugurating the second phase of the "Vuelvan Caras" employment training mission and Mission Science to advance scientific studies. The next week Chavez will kick off more missions and government programs, including the second phase of the Mission Zamora agriculture program, a new Petrochemical Corporation, and a joint Infrastructure Ministry and Sucre Sidewalks and Highways Company office. Another important event this month will be the February 22-23 workshop to evaluate the "Salto Adelante" (Leap Forward) strategy originally unveiled in late 2004 (ref b). Showing that no detail was too small, he also ordered Caracas Mayor Juan Barreto to repair the numerous potholes throughout the city, lest they cost him the election.

Same-day Opposition March a Dud

¶6. (SBU) By contrast, the opposition rally, also held on February 4, drew far fewer people than that of January 23, a fact about which the Chavistas crowed. Local press cited turnout in the hundreds and the state-owned television station split its screen to show the difference in attendance between the two marches. (Comment: There was little enthusiasm due to the lack of political party support and its

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close proximity to the January 23 march.)

Comment

¶7. (C) Chavez was in his element as he railed against the "evil empire" in front of a crowd of some 1.5 million, mostly bussed in, fed and (it is rumored) paid, "supporters." Most of Chavez' talk, as usual, was bluster, although we cannot rule out future expulsions, particularly since he has singled out another military attache. We note, however, that Chavez passed on this perfect opportunity to announce another persona non grata. The Foreign Affairs Ministry has also signaled that this round of expulsions is over, at least for now. As on February 2, the atmosphere of the speech was just as important as what he said. The looming, larger-than-life pictures of Chavez, the chastisement of his administration for being unable to function without his attention, and his billion-dollar solutions were all designed to send the message that all of Venezuela's problems depend on Chavez.

BROWNFIELD